

Events other than war or military coup have introduced Turkey and Saudi Arabia to the modern age.

Change: Turkey & Saudi Arabia

A 16mm sound film or videocassette—25 minutes



Opposites on an ideological spectrum, Turkey and Saudi Arabia best illustrate how nonviolent change has affected the Middle East since World War I. Turkey cast aside its heritage to modernize only to draw opposition from traditionalists over the high cost of progress. In contrast, Saudi Arabia entered the modern age with its Arab, Islamic soul largely intact, but tribalism and Wahhabi Islam—the twin pillars of Saudi society—have been transformed by the requirements of modernity.

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Change

- Examines nonviolent events that have transformed the Middle East in the twentieth century.
- Chronicles the twentieth-century political histories of Turkey and Saudi Arabia and discusses how each society has coped with the clash between tradition and modernity.
- Discusses how Mustafa Kemal Atatürk transformed Turkey from an Islamic autocracy into a Western-style parliamentary democracy.
- Discusses how Saudi Arabia, ruled by the House of Saud since 1932, has emerged into the modern age with its Arab, Islamic soul largely intact.



Content Summary

In the twentieth century war and revolution have dramatically changed the Middle East. But nonviolent change has been just as dramatic, especially in Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

After the First World War the victorious allies scrambled to divide whatever Turkish territory remained. Greek, British, Italian, and French troops all occupied some portion of Anatolia, the only Ottoman province still controlled by the empire. When initial peace attempts failed, the Turks turned to General Mustafa Kemal to secure the withdrawal of foreign powers, and in 1922, after three years of military success, an armistice was signed, liberating Turkey. Turkish nationalists drafted a Western-style parliamentary constitution, creating the modern Republic of Turkey led by Mustafa Kemal.

This accomplished, the next and greater task was to persuade—indoctrinate, if necessary—the Turkish people to discard the age-old traditions of authoritarian rule and religious orthodoxy. This Kemal accomplished, though at times undemocratically, with the “Six Principles of Kemalism”: republicanism (popularly elected government); nationalism (based on citizenship and patriotism rather than religion or ethnicity); populism (equality before the law, an end to class privileges); statism (limited government control of the national economy); secularism (separating church and state); and reformism (originally “revolutionism,” a determination to peacefully discard traditions that obstructed progress).

These principles, however, were not formally lodged in the constitution until 1936. By then, Kemal had abolished the *sharia* (Islamic Holy Law), Arabic script, and veils for women—all of which stood for the Islamic, Ottoman past that would inhibit progress. These reforms went hand-in-hand with such positive changes as the emancipation of women, new school construction, the introduction of welfare programs, and the overhaul of government.

Needless to say, opposition to Kemal emerged among conservative businessmen, religious leaders, and minority groups such as the Kurds, and did not lessen until after Kemal’s death in 1938. In 1947 one-party rule ended and new political groups arose to share the power. The

emergence of extremist and splinter groups during the 1950s prompted a military coup in 1960, and for the next twenty years several ruling coalitions held power. Although elections were held in 1983, three years after yet another military coup, the military still controls Turkey.

In contrast, Saudi Arabia has known no other ruling authority in recent decades than the sovereign House of Saud, and in the last twenty years it has emerged from the desert to become one of the wealthiest nations on earth.

In the 1920s, Ibn Saud, the patriarch of the ruling family, capped a series of military successes against the Hashimite leaders of Arabia with the capture of Islam’s holiest cities. In 1932, as premier leader of the Arabian peninsula, Ibn Saud unified his holdings into the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and established orthodox Wahhabi Islam as the state religion. Saudi Arabia’s legal and moral framework were thus derived directly from the Koran and the sharia, both of which were deemed incompatible with Western-style modernization.

Although Saudi Arabia has entered the modern age with its Arab Islamic soul largely intact, modern necessity has slowly transformed tribalism and Wahhabism—the twin pillars of Saudi society—and at some point the gap between modernism and fundamentalist Islam may be too wide for any Saudi ruler to bridge.

The Middle East Series

The Middlemen: The Pivotal Role of the Middle East (color no. 4001)

At the center of the known world for centuries, the Middle East was a geographical, commercial, ethnic, and religious crossroads. And Middle Easterners were the world's "middlemen"—an ethnocultural blend the elements of which illuminate both the Middle Eastern sensibility and the region's current instability.

The Torchbearers: Bridging the Dark Ages (color no. 4002)

Coincident with the Dark Ages in Europe, Islamic civilization in the Middle East reached its peak. Had Middle Eastern scholars not rediscovered, synthesized, and advanced the knowledge of antiquity, thus laying the groundwork for further exploration and discovery, the European Renaissance and Western civilization as we now know it might never have been.

Holy Land: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Middle East (color no. 4003)

As the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—three of the world's great monotheistic religions—the Middle East has come to be known as the "Holy Land," yet despite the reverence and awe this region's history inspires, disputes based on long-standing religious claims to the land continue to rend its contemporary fabric.

Family Matters: The Role of the Family in the Middle East (color no. 4004)

Traditionally the model upon which social and political life has been based, the large, extended, and patriarchal Middle Eastern family has begun to fragment under Western influence. Although rapid westernization has benefited many, fundamentalists have tried to save the old society by reviving traditional ways, thus heightening regional tensions.

New Frontiers: The Middle East following World War I (color no. 4005)

The nation-states of the Middle East that today wage war for territory and power did not exist before World War I. By creating artificial frontiers and introducing the alien concept of nationalism, a concept that superseded the traditional Middle Eastern identity based on family and religion, certain Western powers may unknowingly have set the stage for today's conflicts.

Captains and Kings: Authority in the Middle East (color no. 4006)

Compelled by ancient precedents and the tenets of Islam to accept authoritarian rule, Middle Eastern nations (except for Turkey, Lebanon, and Israel, each of which is marred by factionalism and religious strife) have resisted the imposition of Western-style governments and still sanction the military regime or the monarchy.

Sects and Violence: Fragmentation within Religions (color no. 4007)

Although sectarian differences between Jews, Christians, and Muslims are a main ingredient of Middle East tensions, the struggle for power and territory is also rife among divergent sects within each faith who are trying to legitimize their religious beliefs and principles.

Ancient and Modern: The Fall and Rise of the Middle East (color no. 4008)

In this century Middle Eastern independence and oil wealth have reversed the region's downward trend that began, ironically, in the midst of Europe's rebirth. State-of-the-art technology has not, however, replaced tradition; the two coexist in an uneasy alliance.

The Story of Oil: Chief Economic Resource of the Middle East (color no. 4009)

Beneath the sand and rock of the Middle East lie two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves. An object of exploitation since ancient times and a cause of current tension within and without the Middle East, oil has nonetheless brought great wealth—though unequally distributed—to a poor region.

Independence: Egypt & Algeria (color no. 4010)

Between the first and second world wars the Middle East moved from a religious and familial consciousness into one that was national and secular. Triggered in part by the decline of European colonial power, this shift effected the independence of Egypt and Algeria after World War II.

Homeland: Israel & Palestine (color no. 4011)

Promised to both the Arabs and the Jews by the British and partitioned by the United Nations into two states, Palestine, which became the independent State of Israel in 1948, is still the object of a protracted struggle between Israelis and Palestinian nationalists, both of whom maintain ancient claims to the territory.

Revolution: Iraq & Iran (color no. 4012)

Since World War II internal political revolutions in such countries as Iraq and Iran have been a salient feature of Middle East politics. Caused in part by postwar economic instability and the withdrawal of colonial powers, the initial unrest was largely a response to Western exploitation.

Change: Turkey & Saudi Arabia (color no. 4013)

Opposites on an ideological spectrum, Turkey and Saudi Arabia best illustrate how nonviolent change has affected the Middle East since World War I. Saudi Arabia entered the modern age with its Arab, Islamic soul intact; Turkey cast aside its heritage to modernize only to draw opposition from traditionalists over the heavy cost of progress.

Identity: Lebanon (color no. 4014)

The religious and civil dissension that has beset Lebanon since the withdrawal of the French in 1946 began with a national identity crisis. Because the Lebanese embody all the elements that now determine the Middle Eastern identity, their recent history may be read as a history in microcosm of twentieth-century Middle East instability.



For Discussion

1. Although the profound changes in Turkey and Saudi Arabia were achieved peacefully, without war or military coup, change was nonetheless imposed from "above" and thus required extensive re-education. Do you accept this sort of radical reform, or do you believe that only a mandate from the people can change the course of a nation? Explain your answer.
2. What advantages and disadvantages might there be to living in a society or nation governed by an official religious code such as the sharia?
3. Despite the 1983 elections, the military still controls Turkey. Research media accounts of the elections and the political climate that followed. How has democracy co-existed with military rule?
4. Prepare a brief report on Mustafa Kemal's "Six Principles of Kemalism" or Ibn Saud's military successes in Arabia.
5. Describe Mustafa Kemal's radical program of change for Turkey. Who opposed it? Why?
6. How did Mustafa Kemal come to be known as "Ataturk"?
7. Discuss how the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia has transformed Saudi Arabian society. Research the radical program of modernization begun by the royal family in the 1960s. How have tribalism and Wahhabi Islam—the twin pillars of Saudi society—been transformed by the requirements of modernity?

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